

## Reading Food Labels

The 6 components of the food label are described below. As a general guideline, choose foods with labels that are low in fat, sodium and sugar grams.

Sample label for  
Macaroni & Cheese

① **Start Here** →

②

③ **Limit these Nutrients**

④ **Get Enough of these Nutrients**

⑥ **Footnote**

**Nutrition Facts**

Serving Size 1 cup (228g)  
Serving Per Container 2

---

**Amount Per Serving**

**Calories** 250      Calories from Fat 110

---

**% Daily Value\***

<b>Total Fat</b> 12g	<b>18%</b>
Saturated Fat 3g	<b>15%</b>
Trans Fat 1.5g	
<b>Cholesterol</b> 30mg	<b>10%</b>
<b>Sodium</b> 470mg	<b>20%</b>
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 31g	<b>10%</b>
Dietary Fiber 0g	<b>0%</b>
Sugars 5g	
<b>Protein</b> 5g	
<hr/>	
Vitamin A	4%
Vitamin C	2%
Calcium	20%
Iron	4%

**Quick Guide to % DV** ⑤

**5% or less is Low**

**20% or more is High**

\* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

- 1) Serving sizes are provided in familiar units, such as cups or pieces, followed by the metric amount, e.g., the number of grams. Serving sizes are based on the amount of food people typically eat, which makes them realistic and easy to compare to similar foods. Pay attention to the serving size, including how many servings there are in the food package, and compare it to how much YOU actually eat! In the sample label above, one serving of macaroni and cheese equals one cup. If you ate the whole package, you would eat two cups. That doubles the calories and other nutrient numbers, including the %Daily Values.

- 2) Calories provide a measure of how much energy you get from a serving of this food. The label also tells you how many of the calories in one serving come from fat. In the example, there are 250 calories in a serving of this macaroni and cheese. How many *calories from fat* are there in ONE serving? Answer: 110 calories, which means almost half come from fat. What if you ate the whole package content? Then, you would consume two servings, or 500 calories, and 220 would come from fat.
- 3) The nutrients listed first are the ones Americans generally eat in adequate amounts, or even too much. They are identified in yellow on the chart as “Limit these Nutrients”. Eating too much fat, saturated fat, *trans* fat, and cholesterol, or sodium may increase your risk of certain chronic diseases, like heart disease, some cancers, or high blood pressure. Eating too many calories is linked to overweight and obesity.
- 4) Americans often don't get enough dietary fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and iron in their diets. They are identified in blue on the chart as “Get Enough of these Nutrients”. Eating enough of these nutrients can improve your health and help reduce the risk of some diseases and conditions.
- 5) This general guide tells you that 5%DV or less is low and 20%DV or more is high. This means that 5%DV or less is low for all nutrients, those you want to limit (e.g., fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium), and those that you want to consume in greater amounts (fiber, calcium, etc). As the Quick Guide shows, 20%DV or more is high for all nutrients.
  - a) *Example:* Look again at the amount of Total Fat in one serving listed on the sample nutrition label for macaroni and cheese. Is 18%DV contributing a lot or a little to your maximum fat limit of 100% DV? Check the Quick Guide to %DV. You see that 18%DV, which is below 20%DV, is not yet high, but what if you ate the whole package (two servings)? You would double that amount, eating 36% of your daily allowance for Total Fat. That amount, coming from just one food, would contribute a lot of fat to your daily diet. It would leave you 64% of your fat allowance ( $100\% - 36\% = 64\%$ ) for *all* of the other foods you eat that day, snacks and drinks included.
- 6) Note the \* used after the heading “%Daily Value” on the Nutrition Facts panel. It refers to the Footnote in the lower part of the nutrition label, which tells you that “%DVs are based on recommendations for a 2,000 calorie diet”. This statement must be on all food labels. But the remaining information in the full footnote may not be on the package if the size of the label is too small. When the full footnote does appear, it will always be the same. It doesn't change from product to product, because it shows dietary advice for all Americans--it is not about a specific food product. The Daily Values are based on expert dietary advice about how much, or how little, of some key nutrients you should eat each day, depending on whether you eat 2,000 or 2,500 calories a day.

For questions or more information, call Kris Calderon, Health Education Administrator at 867-3414 or e-mail at [Kristine.Calderon@jbosc.ksc.nasa.gov](mailto:Kristine.Calderon@jbosc.ksc.nasa.gov)